

## **No Moral Imperative**

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Excerpt from Chapter One:

I was struck recently by several horrific news stories about violent child deaths as a result of abuse. In each story I read, the dead children had many siblings. Knowing first-hand how trying it can be, at times, to take care of children, even with financial resources and plenty of social support, it occurred to me that lack of contraception resulting in repeated, unwanted childbearing might well put children at risk for abuse. So I did some investigating.

That suspicion was confirmed by an examination of the research in this area. Large family size and unplanned pregnancies and births do place children at risk for physical abuse and neglect. Similar to infant mortality, studies have shown that the risks appear to come not only from having a lot of children, but additionally from having children too closely spaced. Further, children from families with two unplanned births are almost three times more likely to experience abuse than children in families with no unplanned births; and children from families with three unplanned births are almost five times more likely to suffer from abuse!

Moreover, in 1996 the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services published the “Third National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect”, which concludes that children with many siblings are also more likely to be neglected. “Children in the largest families were almost three times more likely to be educationally neglected, and two and two-fifths times

more likely to be physically neglected compared to children in families with two or three children.”

Child abuse experts maintain that the best strategy for preventing child abuse and neglect is providing women with family planning services. A Surgeon General’s Workshop on Violence and Public Health, convened by Dr. C. Everett Koop, found that “The starting point for effective child abuse programming is pregnancy planning”.

*Carol is currently at work on a book which examines the genesis of current, unfavorable reproductive health policies, and the adverse impact they have on child health in the U.S. and overseas. For more information or to sign up for updates, visit [www.carolroye.org](http://www.carolroye.org).*